

974.5
R342
no.6
Ser.1
829564

REYNOLDS HISTORICAL
GENEALOGY COLLECTION

M

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 01105 4605

599

RHODE ISLAND

II

HISTORICAL TRACTS.

NO. 6. *Series 1.*



PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1878.

599

1829564

RHODE ISLAND
HISTORICAL TRACTS

NO. 6.

THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND.

AT

PORSCMOUTH, R. I., AUGUST 29, 1878.

Rock 2-6-25



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/rhodeislandhiston6s1ride>

X76
R52
S.1
no.6

Copyright by
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1878.



PRINTED BY PROVIDENCE PRESS COMPANY.

✓

THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

II

OF THE

BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND,

AT PORTSMOUTH, R. I., AUGUST 29, 1878.

COMPRISING

THE ORATION BY EX-UNITED STATES SENATOR SAMUEL G. ARNOLD;
A LETTER OF SIR HENRY PICOT, THE ENGLISH COMMANDER;
A GERMAN ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE;
THE VIEWS OF GENERAL LAFAYETTE.



PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1878.

Copyright by
SIDNEY S. RIDER.

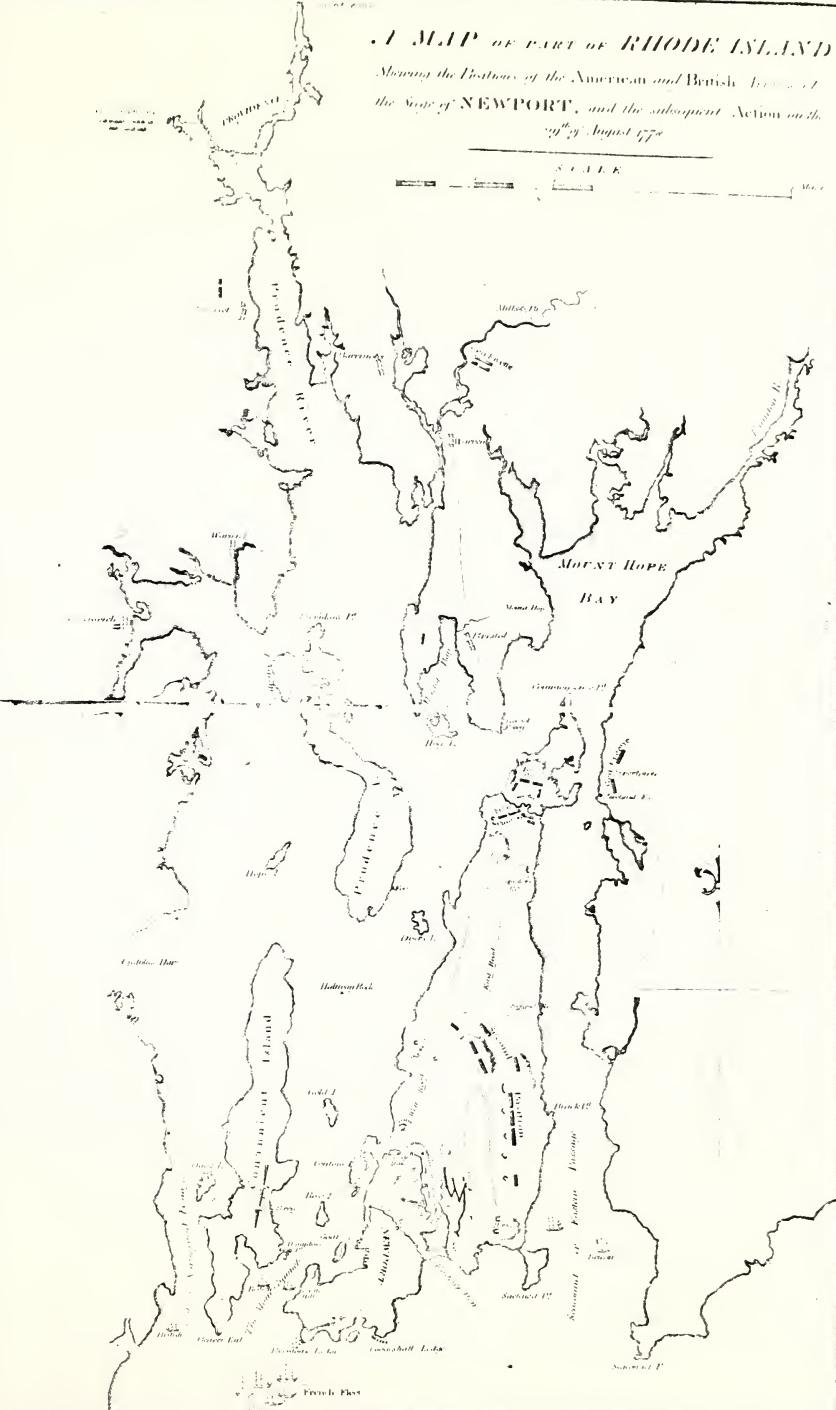
1878.

1167735

A MAP OF PART OF RHODE ISLAND

Showing the Positions of the American and British Forces at
the Siege of NEWPORT, and the subsequent Action on the
29th of August 1778.

S. C. A. E.



PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE Historical Tract herewith presented comprises accounts of the Battle of Rhode Island by three of the four nationalities engaged in the conflict—the American, the German and the English. An opinion held by Lafayette also appears. How nearly this battle came to being the close of the Revolutionary War may be seen from these papers. General Lafayette's opinion was clear: "I believe that this capture would have produced the same decisive result of speedily terminating the American War as was subsequently accomplished by the capture of nearly the same army at Yorktown, by the successful coöperation of the French fleet under Count de Grasse under similar circumstances."

The occurrence of the centennial anniversary of the Battle of Rhode Island on the 29th of August, 1878, was made the occasion of a proper celebration of the event by the First Light Infantry Veteran Association of Providence.

Many invited guests participated in the festivities, prominent among them were the Putnam Phalanx of Hartford. The procession through the streets of Providence was very fine, the line was long, the uniforms of the various corps were very tasteful,

and the drums and fifes and the music of the bands inspiring. The day was all that could be desired. The entire line took steamers to Bristol Ferry, where, disembarking, they marched under a hot sun and over dusty roads to the scene of the battle. The houses along the route were covered with flags, and the entire population turned out *en masse*. On the old battle ground an immense tent had been erected, beneath which the literary exercises were to take place, and tables and seats provided for the great crowd to dine.

An address of welcome was made by George Manchester, Esq., Sheriff of Newport County, and Governor Van Zandt spoke likewise a few words of welcome to the guests from Connecticut, after which Lieutenant-colonel Henry Staples introduced the Honorable Samuel G. Arnold, Ex-United States Senator of Rhode Island, as the Orator of the Day. The oration being finished, the entire party partook of a Rhode Island clam-bake during which many capital speeches were made by prominent people, and mirth and laughter followed the many stories which were told, after which the great crowd departed for their homes.

✓
O R A T I O N

BY THE

HON. SAMUEL G. ARNOLD,

EX-UNITED STATES SENATOR OF RHODE ISLAND.

THE ORATION.

THE second of December, 1776, was a dark day for Rhode Island. It was the prelude to a military occupation by an overwhelming hostile force which for nearly three years was to hold the Island, the strategic key to Southern New England, and to spread terror and destruction over a wide extent of country. This occupation of the island was not to cease till a desperate battle had bathed in blood its fairest fields, and "the best fought action of the war" had proved to a long defiant foe that the entrenchments of Newport were no longer secure. On that day a squadron of eleven ships of war,—seven line of battle ships and four frigates—under Sir Peter Parker, appeared off Block Island, and the next day sailed up the Sound to convoy a fleet of seventy

transports having on board about six thousand troops destined for Newport. All the militia of the State were immediately under arms. Expresses were sent as far as New Hampshire to summon aid. A new regiment was ordered to be drafted at once, and one full regiment of Providence county militia volunteered for service on the island without awaiting the draft. The women and children in the seaboard towns were advised to move with their furniture to the interior. Prisoners of war were placed on board Commodore Hopkins's ships, or sent into the country for security. The stock on Rhode Island and Conanicut was driven off. Warwick Neck was defended by Colonel John Waterman's Kent county regiment, Pawtuxet by Colonel Samuel Aborn, and Tower Hill by Colonel Joseph Noyes. There were about seven hundred troops on the island under Brigadier-general West.

Such was the state of affairs when, on the seventh of December, the British fleet entered the bay, and rounding the north end of Conanicut, anchored off the Middletown shore. On the following day the army disembarked, one regiment on Long Wharf in

Newport, the main body at Greensdale, and after a night of pillage, the next morning marched into Newport. A large portion of them were quartered at the farm houses on the island during the winter. The American troops left the island and encamped at Tiverton and Bristol. The invading army was led by Sir Henry Clinton, with Earl Percy second in command, under whom was Major-general Prescott. It comprised four regiments of British infantry, one of artillery, and a corps of light horse, besides several Hessian regiments, one of which, the Auspachers, was composed of men, none of whom were less than six feet in height.

The appeal for aid was promptly answered. From Massachusetts came the Bristol and Plymouth county brigades under Godfrey and Cushing, with three regiments and a train of artillery from Worcester and Boston, dispatched by the Legislature. From Connecticut came three regiments and five companies, with a small body of artillery, sent by Governor Trumbull. These were quartered at all the defensible points on each side of the bay.

The State and the island were two great hostile

camps. Providence was given up to military occupation. Many of the inhabitants moved away, the college exercises were suspended, and the building was used as barracks, and later as a military hospital. The Assembly met at Providence and appointed a Council of War to manage affairs when it was not in session, and requested the other New England colonies to send committees to Providence to devise means for raising an army, and thus relieve the militia now in the field. A brigade of three regiments was raised for fifteen months service, under command of General Varnum. Two of these regiments were infantry, of seven hundred and fifty men each, commanded by Colonels Benjamin Tallman and Joseph Stanton, and one of artillery, under Colonel Robert Elliott, of three hundred men. General Malmedy, a French officer, was appointed chief engineer and director of the works of defence. Major-general Lincoln was sent to Providence to take the chief command.

On the twentieth of December, martial law was proclaimed by the Council of War. On the twenty-third, the General Assembly met at Providence, and

on the twenty-fifth, the New England Convention of three members from each State also met. The two bodies consulted together, and it was advised that an army of about six thousand men should be concentrated in this State. Of this force, nineteen hundred men were to be furnished by Massachusetts, eleven hundred by Connecticut, three hundred by New Hampshire, and eighteen hundred by Rhode Island, besides one thousand Continental troops.

The return of General Clinton to England in January, 1777, left Lord Percy in command of the hostile force. He was succeeded in July by General Pigot, after the capture of General Prescott by Colonel Barton. During the winter the British erected batteries on the heights at the east side of the island near Fogland Ferry, and also at the north on Butts Hill. Meanwhile two battalions were enlisted for the Continental service, the first commanded by Colonel Christopher Greene, the second by Colonel Israel Angell.

Great efforts were made in October ('77) to drive the enemy from the island. General Spencer, then in command in this State, had charge of the expedi-

tion. The British force at this time numbered about four thousand men. Four regiments, two British and two Hessians, were posted on Windmill Hill, one was on Butts Hill, and two near Newport, while a corps of Grenadiers and light infantry held Fogland Ferry. Nearly nine thousand men assembled for the attack, which was to be made from Tiverton. But a deficiency of boats and a protracted storm so disheartened the troops that many withdrew and the attempt was abandoned. A court of inquiry exonerated Spencer, but his prestige as a commander was gone, and in December he resigned from the army. He was succeeded in the command at Rhode Island by Major-general John Sullivan.

Upon the expiration of the fifteen months for which the State brigade had enlisted, most of the men were re-enlisted for one year under General Cornell. Colonel Archibald Crary succeeded Tallman in the first battalion, and Colonel John Topham succeeded Stanton in the second. Colonel Robert Elliott remained in command of the artillery. An important movement was made early in 1778 at the suggestion of General Varnum, approved by Wash-

ington. This was the enlistment of a negro regiment, for which purpose Colonel Greene and the officers of his battalion at Valley Forge were sent home upon the consolidation of the two Rhode Island battalions at that camp into one. This was the first instance of the employment of colored troops in the history of the country. Let it be remembered that this plan was suggested by a Rhode Island General, James M. Varnum; that it was approved by George Washington; that it was perfected by the line officers of a Rhode Island regiment, Colonel Christopher Greene, Lieutenant-colonel Jeremiah Olney, and Major Samuel Ward, with their subalterns; and that the ranks were filled by Rhode Island slaves who were freed by the act of enlistment, and their owners compensated at a valuation by the General Assembly. Presently we shall see what brilliant results came from this new measure. In less than six months from the organization of the black regiment it was brought into action by Colonel Greene, and settled conclusively this disputed question of the capacity of colored troops, well drilled and well officered, to make brave and reliable soldiers. Nearly

a century later the question was raised again by those who, ignorant of their country's history, denied the ability of a despised and persecuted race to fight the battles of freedom, forgetting that

“ Not to the swift nor to the strong
The battles of the right belong;
For he who strikes for freedom wears
The armor of the captive's prayers,
And Nature proffers to his cause
The strength of her eternal laws.”

And once more, through the long conflict for the Union, the newly-made freedmen fought on Southern soil, as their ancestors had fought in Rhode Island, while the storming of Port Hudson and the mine at Petersburg bore witness to the desperate valor of the colored recruits.

The attack on Warren and Bristol on the twenty-fifth of May, 1778, by a British force of six hundred men, sent to destroy some boats in the Kickemuit river, caused a session of the General Assembly and the calling out of additional troops to protect the State. The arrival off Newport, of a French fleet of twelve ships of the line and four frigates, under

Count DeEstaing, on the twenty-ninth of July, was the signal for important operations. Meanwhile British reinforcements were rapidly reaching Newport. Seven thousand men occupied the island, while General Sullivan had but sixteen hundred in the field, and the other New England States had neglected to send their quotas. One-half of the effective force of the State was called out on the first of August, and the remainder was held ready for instant service. Major-general Greene and Brigadier-general Glover arrived from the army and volunteered for the approaching expedition. These were followed by the Marquis de Lafayette. Two Continental brigades, Varnum's and Glover's, with two companies of artillery from the army at White Plains, arrived on the third of August.

The destruction of British armed vessels, caused by the presence of the French fleet was considerable. Three were blown up in Seacownet river, and four frigates and a corvette were beached and burned on Rhode Island; others were burned in Newport harbor and sunk to obstruct the entrance. On the eighth, DeEstaing entered the harbor and the British

destroyed their two remaining ships. In all two hundred and twelve guns were thus silenced by the French fleet. Volunteers from the neighboring States rapidly gathered, and on the ninth, General Sullivan with ten thousand men began to cross from Tiverton to the north end of the island. At the same time four thousand French troops, intending to co-operate with Sullivan, landed on Conanicut. But that evening a British fleet of thirty-six sail, under Lord Howe, appeared in sight. The French troops reembarked that night, and the next morning DeEstaing put to sea to engage the enemy. Sullivan occupied the abandoned forts at the north part of the island, and the British fell back within their lines, about three-fourths of a mile from Newport, burning the houses in their retreat. Colonel Livingston with a strong detachment advanced within a mile and a half of the hostile lines, and orders were issued for an advance of the whole army the next morning. The right wing was commanded by Major-general Greene, the left by General Lafayette, the second line, composed of Massachusetts volunteers, by General Hancock, and the reserve by Colonel West. But that

night a terrible storm arose which lasted for two days. The rival squadrons were dispersed and not heard from for several days. Some of the ships were dismasted. The tents were blown down, and the army, exposed to cold and rain, suffered greatly. On the morning of the fifteenth, Sullivan advanced his whole army and encamped within two miles of the British lines, which extended from Tonomy Hill to Easton's Pond. That night a force occupied Honeyman's Hill, on the enemy's right, within half a mile of their front works on Bliss's Hill. For five days, from the sixteenth to the twentieth, an incessant cannonade was kept up along the lines, and the enemy were compelled to evacuate some of their out-works. Meanwhile, on the seventeenth, the Council of War called out the remaining one-half of the effective force of the State to supply the loss of the French auxiliaries.

An embargo was laid on all vessels for one week to allow their crews to join the expedition. The return of the French fleet on the twentieth greatly encouraged the besiegers, who now felt certain of capturing the entire British force within forty-eight

hours. But this hope was destined to a bitter disappointment. In vain did Greene and Lafayette, at the instance of Sullivan, endeavor to persuade DeEstaing, to co-operate in the reduction of Newport. The admiral sailed the next day (twenty-first) for Boston to refit. The American officers drew up a protest against his departure at such a crisis, which Lafayette refused to sign. A fast vessel was sent to overtake the fleet and deliver the protest to DeEstaing.

Congress submitted this paper to the French minister, Gerard, whose secret dispatch to the Count de Vergennes relating to it, which many years ago was shown to me through the courtesy of the then Minister of Marine, closes with the sententious comment, "Malheureusement ce pays est peuple de tetes exaltees." Sullivan's army was demoralized by this untoward event. Great numbers of the volunteers withdrew. All but one of the enemy's outworks had already been carried, and it was the general's intention to storm the works. But it was found that only fifty-four hundred effective troops remained. It was therefore decided to fall back on the fortified

hills at the north, and await the return of the French fleet.

The retreat began in the evening of the twenty-eighth, and by two o'clock that night the army encamped on Butts Hill, the right wing on the west road, and the left on the east road, with covering parties on each flank. Colonel Livingston's light corps was stationed on the east road, and another under Colonel Laurens, Colonel Fleury and Major Talbot on the west road, each three miles in front of the camp, and in their rear was the piquet guard under Colonel Wade. Such was the disposition of the American troops on the morning of the eventful day. At daylight of the twenty-ninth the British army in two columns marched out by the two roads. At seven o'clock the battle began. Similar scenes have been too sadly familiar to the present generation to require a detailed description in order to bring them before the mind in all the horror, the excitement and the sublimity of war.

Perhaps no poet in the English tongue has drawn so vivid a picture of a battle field in so brief terms as Proctor in "The Fight of Ravenna":

“ Oh the bellowing thunders,
The shudders, the shocks,
When thousands 'gainst thousands,
Come dashing like rocks ;
When the rain is all scarlet,
And clouds are half fire,
And men's sinews are snapped
Like the strings of a lyre,
When each litter's a hearse
And each bullet a knell,
When each breath is a curse,
And each bosom a hell ! ”

But the battle bard of Scotland sang of another and a greater fight, in strains that depict in terrible detail some of the incidents in this which we are met to celebrate :

“ Far other harvest home and feast
Than claims the boor from scythe released,
On these scorched fields were known ;
Death hovered o'er the maddening rout,
And from the thrilling battle shout,
Sent for the bloody banquet out,
A summons of his own.
Through rolling smoke the demon's eye
Could well each destined guest espy,
Well could his ear in ecstasy

Distinguish every tone
That filled the chorus of the fray.
From cannon roar and trumpet bray,
From charging squadron's wild hurrah,
And the loud clang that marked their way,
Down to the dying groan,
And the last sob of life's decay
When breath has all but flown.
Feast on, stern foe of mortal life,
Feast on! but think not that a strife
With such promiscuous carnage rife,
Protracted space may last.
The deadly tug of war at length
Must limits find in human strength,
And cease when these are passed.
Vain hope! That morn's o'erclouded sun
Heard the wild shout of fight begun
Ere he attained his height;
And through the war-smoke volumed high
Still peals that unremitting cry,
Though now he stoops to night.
For ten long hours of doubt and dread
Fresh succors from the extended head
Of either hill the contest fed;
Still down the slope they drew.
The charge of columns paused not,
Nor ceased the storm of shell and shot,
For all that war could do

Of skill and force was proved that day,
And turned not yet the doubtful fray
On bloody Waterloo."

So sang Scotland's bard of the bloodiest battle in British history. Too well do portions of the verse describe the fearful fight which has made the island of Rhode Island classic ground to every American who loves liberty or admires heroic valor.

A series of heavy skirmishes opened the engagement, and a regiment was sent to reinforce each of the two advanced corps, with orders for them to retire upon the main body, which was done in perfect order. The accounts vary as to which column commenced the fight, one attributing it to Major Talbot on the west road; but the most circumstantial points to a spot near the Gibbs farm, where a cross road connects the two main roads, and to the field now included between the east road and a middle road which here runs north from the cross road and parallel with the main road. A broad field enclosed by stone walls at this corner concealed a portion of the American piquet. The Union meeting-house now stands at the southeast angle of this field. Here the

Twenty-second British regiment, Colonel Campbell, which had marched out by the east road, divided, and one-half of it turning to the left into the cross roads, fell into the ambuscade. A terrible slaughter ensued. The Americans, springing from behind the walls, poured a storm of bullets upon the bewildered enemy, reloaded and repeated the desolating fire before the British could recover from the shock. Nearly one-quarter of the ill-fated Twenty-second were stretched upon the field. Two Hessian regiments came up to their relief, but too late. The Americans, according to orders, had already retreated. A general assault was made upon the American left wing. This was repulsed by General Glover, who drove the enemy into their works on Quaker Hill. Upon the highlands extending north from this hill the Hessian columns were formed. The American army was drawn up in three lines, the first in front of their works on Butts Hill, the second in rear of the hill, and the reserve near a creek about half a mile in rear of the first line. Between the two hills the distance is about one mile, with low meadow and, at that time, woodland between. At nine o'clock a

heavy cannonade commenced and continued the whole day. About ten o'clock the British ships of war and some gunboats came up the bay and opened fire upon the American right flank. Under cover of this fire a desperate attempt was made to turn the flank and storm a redoubt on the American right. The British right wing had already been repulsed by General Glover. The enemy now concentrated his whole force upon the new point of attack. The action became general, and for nearly seven hours raged with fury ; but between ten o'clock and noon the fighting was most desperate. Down the slope of Anthony's Hill the Hessian columns and British infantry twice charged upon the forces led by Major-general Greene, which were composed of the four brigades of Var-num, Cornell, Glover, and Christopher Greene. These attacks were repulsed with great slaughter. An eye witness told me that sixty were found dead in one spot : at another, thirty Hessians were buried in one grave.

To turn the flank and capture the redoubt was to decide the battle. A third time, with added ranks and the fury of despair the enemy rushed to the

assault. The strength of the Americans was well-nigh spent, and this last charge was on the point of proving successful, when two events occurred which turned the tide of battle. Two Continental battalions were thrown forward by General Sullivan to the support of his exhausted troops, and at the critical moment a desperate charge with the bayonet was made by Colonel Jackson's regiment led by the gallant Lieutenant-colonel Henry B. Livingston. This furious bayonet charge, says an eye witness, immediately threw the balance of victory into the American scale. And now it was that the newly raised black regiment, under Colonel Christopher Greene, justified the hopes of its leaders and contributed in no small degree to decide the fortunes of the day. Headed by their major, Samuel Ward, and posted in a grove in the valley, they three times drove back the Hessians, who strove in vain to dislodge them, and so bloody was the struggle that on the day after the battle the Hessian colonel who had led the charge applied for a change of command, because he dared not lead his regiment again to action lest his men should shoot him for causing them so great a loss.

While the fight was raging on the right and centre of the line, the Massachusetts brigade, under General Lovell, attacked the British right and rear with complete success. Two heavy batteries brought forward to engage the ships of war obliged them to haul off. The desperate attempt to turn the American flank had failed, and the battle was already won by Sullivan.

The British retreated to their camp closely pursued by the victorious Americans, who captured one of their batteries on Quaker Hill. Sullivan then desired to storm the works, but the exhausted condition of his troops, who had been for thirty-six hours without rest or food, and continually on the march, at labor or in battle, compelled him to abandon the attempt. The hand-to-hand fighting was over early in the afternoon, but the cannonade continued until night closed over the hard-fought field. Of the five thousand Americans engaged only about fifteen hundred had ever before been in action. They were opposed by veteran troops superior in numbers and in discipline, and with an obstinaey rarely equalled in the annals of war. These facts justify the comment

ascribed to Lafayette, that "THE BATTLE ON RHODE ISLAND WAS THE BEST-FOUGHT ACTION OF THE WAR." The total loss of the enemy was one thousand and twenty-three, that of the Americans two hundred and eleven.

This brilliant action was scarcely more creditable to General Sullivan and the officers and men of his command than was the masterly retreat from the island which immediately followed it. In his dispatch to Congress, announcing the result, he says: "To make a retreat in the face of an enemy equal if not superior in numbers, and across a river without loss, I know was an arduous task, and seldom accomplished, if attempted." The causes which compelled a retreat were imperative. The morning after the battle Sullivan was advised of the approach of Lord Howe with five thousand troops for the relief of Newport, and also that DeEstaing could not return as soon as had been hoped. The difficulties of the retreat were great, and are expressed in the dispatch just quoted. The opposing sentries were within two hundred yards of each other. Stratagem, promptness and audacity were all required for a successful

result; but Sullivan was equal to the occasion. Tents were pitched in sight of the enemy, and nearly the whole army was employed in fortifying the camp. Meanwhile the heavy baggage and stores were rapidly sent to the rear, and ferried across to Tiverton. An incessant cannonade was kept up through the day. At dark the tents were struck, the light baggage and troops passed down, and before midnight the main army had safely crossed to the main land. Lafayette, who had been sent to hasten the movements of DeEstaing, had ridden from Boston in six and a half hours, and arrived in time to command the rear guard and bring off the pickets and covering parties. This was done without the loss of a particle of baggage, although exposed to a heavy fire from the enemy, from which Sullivan's Life Guard, under command of Aaron Mann, who brought up the rear, suffered severely. Mann was made a captain, Levi Hoppin first, and George Potter second lieutenant, and John Westcott, ensign, for gallantry displayed on that occasion. This retreat was a masterly military manœuvre, and as well-timed as skillfully conducted, for the next morning the army of

Sir Henry Clinton appeared off Newport. By this arrival, the British forces were augmented to nearly eleven thousand men, while the troops under Sullivan now numbered little more than three thousand. The thanks of Congress were voted to General Sullivan and his army for their gallantry in the battle and their conduct in the retreat, and the approval of Washington was communicated in general orders. Thus closed the great military event of the year 1778.

It has been said by the highest military authority of our times, the late Duke of Wellington, that a "victory followed by a retreat is equivalent to a defeat." Such certainly was not the fact in the case before us. The battle was itself a victory at every point. The mooted question of the ability of raw recruits to cope successfully with disciplined troops, which had several times before received a bloody but decisive solution, was here again determined as to the larger portion of the army under Sullivan. An entirely novel experiment, to which reference has already been made, was likewise tested with signal success—the value of colored troops as soldiers. To Major Samuel Ward and the gallant regiment of

freedmen, now for the first time under fire, is due the repulse of the Hessian charge three times repeated at the most desperate and critical period of the battle. In that valley at the foot of Anthony's Hill, which became to so many of friend and foe "the shadow of death," the war cry of an emancipated race rang out the prophecy which eighty-four years later received its tardy fulfillment in the proclamation of Lincoln, and became an established fact on the surrender at Appomattox. Again, the battle convinced the invaders that the strategic key to the Eastern States could only be securely held at a cost in troops which crippled their operations in other quarters, and fourteen months later compelled the evacuation of the island, when in October, 1779, the war was transferred from Rhode Island to Georgia, and the siege of Newport gave place to the siege of Savannah.

We have thus briefly sketched the principal incidents of the battle, and glanced at its chief results. An hundred years have passed since that memorable day. The war clouds that rolled away from this battle ground were the last that have darkened the sun of Rhode Island. An hundred harvests have since

been gathered in, and three generations of men have ploughed and reaped these fields since the tramp of hostile armies shook the land. And now the grandsons and the great-grandsons of the men who made this soil a modern Marathon, have met to do honor to their memory.

May the principles of liberty, of justice and of truth, which here were vindicated in the reeking blood of our forefathers, never lose their hold upon the hearts of their descendants; but may they go down to remotest generations, the legacy and example of the wise and good, "to the latest syllable of recorded time"—while of those who perished here it shall be said :

" On Fame's eternal camping ground
Their silent tents are spread;
And glory guards with solemn round
The bivouac of the dead "

1167795

OPERATIONS IN RHODE ISLAND.

SIEGE OF NEWPORT.

FROM "DIE DEUTSCHEN HÜLFSTRUPPEN IN NORDAMERIKANISCHEN
BEFREIUNGSKRIEGE." 1776 bis 1783.

BY MAX VON EELKING.

HANOVER, 1863. VOLUME II., PAGES 30-44.

COMPILED FROM THE

JOURNALS OF CAPTAIN FRIEDRICH V. D. MALSBURG, REGIMENT V.
DITFURTH,—FEBRUARY, 1776, TO 16TH NOVEMBER, 1780,—
AND OTHER GERMAN OFFICERS, EYE WITNESSES AND
PARTICIPANTS IN THE AFFAIRS DESCRIBED.

TRANSLATED BY

J. WATTS DE PEYSTER,

Brigadier (Brevet Major) General, S. N. Y.

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN RHODE ISLAND.

In the course of the events of the year 1778, we must now turn to Rhode Island, in order to follow, likewise, the successive occurrences which took place in that quarter.

The troops stationed there enjoyed, with the exception of the outpost service and of worrying attacks on the part of the enemy, tolerable quiet throughout the winter, the spring and the commencement of summer. This quiet was first disturbed by the approach of the French.

On the twenty-sixth of July, in the evening, the British sloop-of-war Falcon arrived from New York in the harbor of Newport, and brought information from Admiral [Lord Howe] and General Clinton to General Pigot and Commodore Brisbon [Brisbane],

that the French fleet under Admiral DeEstaing, which had for some time lain at [off] Sandy Hook, had sailed away, steering northeast; it therefore behooved those at Newport to be on the lookout. All the preparations for defence were at once begun. The south points of the island of Conanicut, [Beaver Tail and Dumplings], which lay westerly from Newport, and Brenton's Neck, a rocky tongue of land south of the city [Newport], were provided with new batteries, and the old ones were repaired. The greatest activity prevailed everywhere.

This haste was necessary, for already on the next morning (twenty-seventh July), a fleet was seen in the southeast, steering directly towards the island. It was, however, uncertain whether they were British or the enemy's vessels. Towards noon, sixteen stately war-ships were distinguished, and as it was a beautiful clear day, all who could spare the time were gazing eagerly out from Brenton's Neck, or from the cliffs, upon the noble spectacle afforded by this stately squadron as it approached.

A British sloop-of-war was sent out of the harbor to reconnoitre, which, as it came near the hostile

vessels, gave the usual salute of a cannon shot. As this remained unanswered, it fired another, and immediately following it, a third. These likewise remained again without response. It was one o'clock in the afternoon when the fleet anchored before the entrance of the harbor. All at once the white flag with the Three Lilies waved at the mast-heads, and every one was assured as to whom they had before them.

The ships lay in an arc from Point Judith on the northeast coast of Narragansett [western portion of the Colony of Rhode Island] to Brenton's Neck. Thus the harbor was completely blocked in. They were noble vessels which rocked majestically on the water; twelve ships of the line and four frigates. Danger threatened, however, not only from the sea, but from the land side also; for General Pigot had already learned that an American army, from the four New England provinces, was gathering at Providence, Rhode Island, in order to attack [the island of] Rhode Island proper from two sides at once. Those in command of this position now took their measures.

The two regiments Ansbach-Bayreuth and the bat-

talion Prince of Wales [Loyal American] Volunteers [Colonel Montfort Brown] were brought over from Conanicut to Rhode Island, only fifty men being left behind. The troops passed through the city and pitched their camp on Windmill Hill [now known as Slate Hill, about four miles from Newport]. Towards five o'clock, three of the enemy's frigates advanced and approached the Second river [East or Seacownet passage up to Tiverton], into which some of the British ships had withdrawn themselves. As these, however, were received with a heavy fire from the ships and batteries, they desisted from any further approach, and anchored before Sachuest [the present second] Beach.

On the morning of the thirtieth, two of the enemy's ships of the line came opposite Conanicut. These opened their fire against the batteries on this island, and, after passing them, pressed into Narragansett Sound [or Bay]. The fifty men of the Ansbach-Bayreuth regiment left there, were obliged to leave their works after destroying their ammunition and spiking their cannon. They crossed in boats, and joined their regiment. The island was now oc-

cupied by the enemy [French], and the British frigates lying in the stream were obliged to take refuge under the protection of the land batteries. The communication of the French fleet with Providence was thus established, and upon this many small American vessels joined themselves to it.

About three, p. m., the three French frigates, which the day before had advanced, hoisted sail again, steered between the eastern and western coasts into Seaconnet Sound [mouth of Seaconnet river] and pushed up to the batteries at Fogland Ferry [half way up to Tiverton], where they anchored and thus lay directly in front of a company of the von Dittfurth regiment at Black Point [Barker's Hill]. Although the cannon of the batteries could reach the ships, they remained quiet. Suddenly, however, smoke and fire rose up from the river; the British ships, beneath the batteries, which could no longer be saved, had been set on fire. The heated guns discharged themselves, one after another, and scattered their ball and canister in every direction. One powder magazine after the other, exploded with a tremendous shock, followed by a rain of fragments,

great and small. As the cables were burned in two, the blazing ships, or rather wrecks, drove with the commencing ebb directly toward the French ships, which sent out their boats, either to guide them off or to rescue a part of the unconsumed material. But just as the boats reached the ships the last powder magazine exploded with a deafening clap, spreading death and destruction about it. All this occurred under the eyes of the Hessian company, commanded by Captain von Malsburg; next to it stood the Fifty-fourth English regiment, on which von Malsburg was to withdraw in case he could no longer hold his post.

In the meantime the work of fortifying went briskly on, and since sufficient [white] assistance was lacking, the negroes were obliged to join in the work. Horses and all kinds of cattle were driven within the lines at Newport; each householder received one cow for his subsistence. In order to embarrass still more the hostile fleet in entering the harbor, almost all the transports were sunk and fire-ships got ready. On the third of August, the regiment von Bünau received orders to move forward to the com-

pany of Captain von Malsburg, at Black Point. The regiment, however, was relieved the next day by that of Ansbach. On the fifth, the two French line-of-battle ships, lying in Narragansett Sound, again steered forward toward the British war ships lying there. Among them several fine frigates were burned at Dominic or Tonomy [Miantonomi] Hill [where Mr. Hazard has erected an observatory] or sunk in order that they should not fall into the hands of the French. In the whole, eight ships were burned and thirteen sunk.

For a considerable time, those on the outlook at Fogland Ferry had noticed lively activity on the opposite coast toward present Tiverton, where General Greene held command. The Americans were forming a new encampment, consequently there was every appearance that they designed an attack before long from this point. [Tiverton.] As the British ships on the opposite side were now destroyed, the Americans landed several times on the West coast [Rhode Island, proper] and plundered the nearest houses that belonged to Royalists.

On the sixth, Newport was, by Pigot's orders, en-

tirely closed ; only the military were allowed to pass in and out. Those houses lying within cannon range of the works were levelled ; all the trees, hedges and walls were cut and torn down. The sailors occupied a separate encampment, and were employed with others in all kinds of work. The endurance of the troops was taxed to the uttermost, since they were kept, by night as well as by day, at work or under arms, because an attack was hourly expected. No one could account for the prolonged quiet on the part of the enemy [Americans and French], until, finally, on the eighth of August, the Count DeEstaing put an end to the anxiety. When at mid-day, a thick fog cleared off, the British suddenly perceived two French ships of the line close in. A cannonade was expected, but, quietly and majestically, these sea collossi passed by with port-holes yawning open. They took a southerly course, and soon disappeared around a craggy promontory of the island.

Suddenly at four, p. m., eleven French ships steered toward Newport, and, under a heavy cannonade, stood for the entrance of the harbor in order to force it. They sailed rapidly past, firing, however, at the

town and at the batteries. The greater number of their balls passed over the houses and struck partly in the camp of the Ansbach-Bayreuth regiment on the other side. The solid and well-manned batteries meanwhile gave the ships so hot a reception, that these latter soon sheered off and anchored out of range. They remained there temporarily to repair in some measure the damage they had received. One British frigate, still in the harbor, and some transports were burned in the greatest haste. By this, the town and garrison were threatened with great misfortune, for the wind drove the flames on to the land and toward a large powder magazine, and the burning material flying wildly, might easily have set fire to the latter. Proper measures, especially the active assistance of the citizens, averted the danger.

Pigot had in haste sent for the troops posted at Fogland Ferry and Windmill Hill [on the east shore of Seacownet sound or river, northeast and across from Black Point] and Quaker Hill to garrison Bannister Heights, which ran diagonally across the island near and above, north of the city.

When, at ten, A. M., on the ninth, the fog cleared away, the French fleet was seen at anchor between Conanicut and Gold [Gould] and Pest [Rose?] island. The concentrated troops were covered from the enemy's fire by Dominic [Tonomy] Hill as well as by other heights. The regiments thus crowded together occupied a very unfavorable position, in case of a combined attack upon them, since the narrow space cramped all movement while the balls from the enemy's shipping struck directly into their masses. On this account the spirits both of officers and men were very much depressed. The only remaining hope was the succor of the British fleet under Howe. This was momentarily expected. To the great joy of the besieged, its approach was clearly made out. Not less than thirty-six vessels were counted from Dominic [Tonomy] Hill. The French Admiral's flagship, the Languedoc of ninety guns, hoisted a signal flag. Upon this, one of the ships lying in the Narragansett Sound [or Bay] sailed out to reconnoitre. All at once, red flags fluttered from all the French ships, and a large body of troops were next landed on Conanicut Island. Upon this it was sup-

posed that the fleet would quickly commence an attack, and that the troops which had been landed were to sustain this from the west side. Pigot sent one of his aides in a boat to meet the English fleet. A collision was expected this very day, but the succeeding light winds kept off the British fleet. At night the ships were still a german mile [that is three to four or even five english miles] from the harbor. Pigot, who was still expecting an attack, brought his second line of troops near to his first. After retreat was sounded the Bayreuth regiment was hurried three miles further forward, because it was understood that the Americans would attempt a landing (by Tiverton and Bristol ferries) from the main land in boats.

The French were busied during the whole night in repairing as much as possible their injured ships. At first dawn of the tenth, the British fleet was seen cruising in front of the port. The French meanwhile weighed anchor and sailed out of the harbor and past the batteries under a heavy fire. A sea fight was now expected, but so soon as the cannon smoke cleared off it was seen with surprise that the

British fleet, although in line of battle, was drawing off. Thereupon the French ships now set all sail in pursuit, and to the great astonishment of the land troops, both fleets took their course S. S. E., until they finally disappeared in the distance.

It is remarkable that notwithstanding the tremendous fire from the French ships, both when they ran in and ran out of the harbor, during which it is calculated that they fired ten thousand round shot, not a single man was killed in the batteries. On the other hand the French had suffered considerably, especially from the batteries of Fort George on Goat's Island, and from those on Brenton's Neck, as they filed out, one after the other. The French threw their dead overboard at once and a great part of them were washed upon the coast. While these events were occurring, several hostile detachments from the commands of Gates and Sullivan, from Bristol and Providence, had crossed the intervening channel [Tiverton or Howland's Ferry] and were prepared to support the attack by the fleet. When this sailed away so suddenly, these other operations likewise ceased.

On the eleventh (August), the Bayreuth regiment moved from the second into the first line of defence. The whole camp was likewise drawn somewhat more in behind the heights and nearer to Dominic [Tonomy] Hill, an elevation which covered the left flank of the lines. This hill was a rocky, well-fortified eminence, to which, in the last necessity, the troops could withdraw, and for a while maintain themselves if forced to retreat. Three captured American officers, of the New Hampshire Volunteers, declared that their army was at Windmill [now Slate] Hill, twenty thousand strong,* and was led by the Generals Sullivan, Greene and LaFayette, and also that President [of Congress] Hancock was with it. On this information the British began to throw up a new line behind the abattis on the right. Such a storm ["The Great Storm" of August, 1778,] raged that the majority of the tents were thrown down. This tempest continued [from the eleventh] until

* Major-general Heath, in his "Memoirs," 1798, pages 190-211, gives the details of General Sullivan's force on Rhode Island on the eleventh August, 1778: Total, 10,122, "exclusive of some volunteers from New Hampshire and other corps," not counting the French.

the thirteenth, and was accompanied with floods of rain.

With clearer weather, on the fifteenth, the American encampment could be seen from the heights. It was quite extended, and about five miles distant at Honeyman's and Beckham's Hill. The work on the fortifications was now pushed on, day and night, and with redoubled energy against an enemy so very near and of fourfold strength. The lines were surrounded by strong abattis, and behind them were raised ten principal redoubts. Now and then the American troops approached the posts and the batteries, but were, in general, easily dispersed.

By the seventeenth the Americans had erected a battery which opened its fire. On the same day the British began a second line [of works] intended to cover, in rear, the garrison of the other line. This being not only flanked on the right but taken in rear by the batteries of the enemy, Pigot drew his troops yet closer together.

The Americans now had approached so near with their batteries, that, on the nineteenth of August, a heavy reciprocal cannonade developed itself. Since

the British guns at this point were mostly served by sailors, who so far had shown less skill than the regular artillerists, the shots were less telling. The British tents were torn by the American shot, but they generally passed too high. Still a number of bombs and of solid shot reached their mark.

The case of the troops, so much huddled together, threatened to become hopeless. Pigot found himself, therefore, towards evening, compelled to withdraw his camp as far as possible behind Dominic [Tonomy] Hill, whereas at first it was pitched in front of it. On the morning of the twentieth the hostile shots reached even to this point, since, during the night, two strong American batteries had been placed in advance. These again threw bombshells, but without effect. Notwithstanding all these advantages, the working parties on the enemy's [Americans] fortifications were dispersed.

It seems, from the preparations of the besiegers, that the French fleet would soon return from its pursuit of the British and co-operate with them. This fleet indeed did show itself at a long distance off in the southeast.

From Brenton's Neck there was a long outlook seaward. For this reason many gathered at this battery, who, with excited expectation and foreboding, awaited coming events. Even the most hopeful now desponded. Superior numbers in front and rear, and the closely massed troops exposed to the most destructive fire from the ships, there was little hope of favorable result.

The [French] fleet anchored at evening on its former ground, opposite Point Judith. There were now only eleven ships; one or another was partially dismasted. From this it was concluded that the fleet had suffered severely from the late storm. The night passed in fearful expectation. The troops, wearied almost to utter exhaustion, had to continue under arms. To escape this desperate situation, seemingly certain destruction or captivity, desertion now set in pretty strongly. To prevent this as much as possible, and to enliven the sinking spirits of the troops, good news were fabricated and published. General Clinton, it was stated, had entirely dispersed Washington's army, and was himself in the very heart of Connecticut, and therefore the American forces be-

fore Newport would have to withdraw to reinforce those of Washington; Lord Howe was in pursuit of the French fleet, and would soon make his appearance, and yet other reports.

The much dreaded day, the twenty-first, to the astonishment of all, passed off quietly. The French fleet remained motionless, and at daybreak on the twenty-second began to sail away. Every one breathed more freely, and men's countenances looked brighter. Pigot, who could not account for what had happened, had one of the inhabitants of Conanicut Island brought over to him by the sailors. The man declared "that the French fleet had been badly damaged by the late storm, and its commander had expected on his return to find the harbor of Newport open and the town occupied by the Americans. Such not being the case, he had sailed for Boston."

On the land-side, meanwhile, the Americans continued their operations as before. They made preparations for a formal siege of the British troops in their fortifications. Already they had four batteries of heavy pieces in play, and on the twenty-third they erected a fifth; but on the British side new ones

were opposed to them, and on the twenty-fourth, one of these opened, which answered expectations by exploding an American powder magazine. The firing grew continually hotter. If the cannons were silent during the night, the mortars boomed all the heavier. During the day the men suffered from an almost unendurable heat [as at Monmouth, twenty-eighth June, 1778], especially on the twenty-fifth, on which account the firing was on that day somewhat relaxed. Again, in the night, the outposts were attacked by the Americans, but these were bravely repulsed. On the twenty-seventh, a new ally appeared who was most joyfully greeted. This was three British frigates. They brought the news that General Gray, with thirty-five hundred men had already embarked at New York for the purpose of raising the Siege of Rhode Island. In the night the Americans withdrew a great part of their artillery to the main land, and left on the island only three batteries in activity. It had been expected, more certainly than ever, that the Americans, on the twenty-ninth of August, would make a general attack, to storm the works, in order to bring affairs to a decision before the arrival

of reinforcements to the British, the approach of which must have been known to the former. The garrison of Newport was, therefore, not a little surprised, in the morning, when the British fire re-opened, that no response was made to it, and it was finally apparent that the Americans had withdrawn. Pigot at once gave directions to follow them up, and ordered out, for this purpose, a detachment of two thousand men, composed of the Light Infantry, the Grenadiers and the regiments Ansbach and Bayreuth, to which were added some field pieces. The command of the advanced guard of the detachment, which consisted of one hundred and forty-seven men from the different Hessian regiments, was given to Captain von Malsburg. He early received orders to march his men to the Irish Redoubt. As to his subsequent action, let his report be quoted: "On my arrival," he says, "I found the commanding general with one of his aides sitting in a cariole [carry-all, or Canadian Cabriolet]. He called me to him and said: 'The enemy are in retreat. Follow them by the west road, attack their rear and harrass them as much as possible. Endeavor to find out from the in-

habitants the best route in pursuit of the enemy, and set fire to the houses of those who give you false information. Should you find the enemy too superior in numbers, then await reinforcements which shall be sent after you. I give you two Light Dragoon troopers in order that you may send me news of any important occurrences.””

The “west road” was the highway from south to north along the west side of the island. The Light infantry and the Grenadiers which came up at the same time with Captain von Malsburg, received orders to advance along the east side. The troops set out, and after Malsburg had rapidly advanced three miles, he found himself at the works on Redwood’s Hill [in the immediate neighborhood of “Redwood,” the country seat of Elbert J. Anderson, on the west road], which was still held by the Americans. He sent back one of the dragoons to Pigot with this information, and drew back the advance of the vanguard which he had sent forward under a lieutenant. He then dashed at the enemy’s outposts. These were firing behind some walls, but were, with the loss of one killed and several wounded, soon driven. In

the meantime a height, on which there were some abandoned works, was gained, and the British were now within range of the enemy. Malsburg then caused the right wing and centre of his command to cross over a wall situated on the right of the road, so that the two wings surrounded the height on which the Americans had posted themselves. With a hearty huzza, his troops, from three sides at once, now stormed the heights with the bayonet. The Americans gave one full volley, but so badly aimed that not a shot told, and then abandoned their positions. They now fell back some three hundred paces to another fortified elevation which was already occupied by troops in blue and white uniform [Continents—regulars?]. This work was also taken by storm, but here the Hessians lost some dead and wounded. On the further advances, our right wing was in danger of being flanked by an American detachment concealed in a field of Indian corn, and which suddenly fired. Malsburg hastened hither to aid with a sub-division. Here he found Captain Noltenius lying on the ground, wounded. After speaking a few words to him, he committed him to the care of some

soldiers, and pressed forward under the continued fire.

The whole American line now drew back. They were followed until they had again placed themselves behind walls and thickets. An officer in a green and white uniform [Laurens?] and sword in hand, galloped about along their front and endeavored to encourage them. As the Hessians, however, flanked both wings and dashed toward the centre, the enemy again fell back. The Hessians here again left one dead and some wounded on the field. Here Captain von Malsburg was slightly wounded in one hand just as he had placed it on a stone, and was about to spring over a wall. Wounded Americans, who lay moaning on the ground, begged for some water, but no one could give them the refreshing potion, since, in consequence of the heat, all the canteens had been drunk dry, and the Hessians themselves suffered dreadfully from thirst. The wounded said that they belonged to the Light Continental troops from Pennsylvania, and were in General Glover's command. As the pursuit was continued, Malsburg noticed an American not far from him taking aim. He made an

involuntary movement of his head just as the piece was discharged, and the ball grazed his hat. Directly after this the Americans again drew up. They had as a cover for their right wing, a detachment of Light Dragoons. This stand, however, did not check the Hessians in moving forward as rapidly as before, and again driving the enemy. In this way the Americans had been forced back for five miles, and we were now upon the heights of Turkey Hill, not far from the north end of the island. From this point Malsburg pushed forward into the valley near Barrington's Hill. Here, however, our ammunition failed us, and he halted behind a protecting wall. The Americans advanced again more strongly, and garnished Barrington's Hill with three field pieces, which at once opened fire. Malsburg still further deployed his files in order to render the opposing fire less hurtful, but soon Lieutenant Murarius was wounded, Malsburg had him put upon a horse, taken from a captured dragoon, and set out to procure ammunition. This arrived at last in a wagon. When it had been distributed, the Hessians were on fire to pursue their victorious career, and especially to take

the guns on the hill. Some of our artillery also came up and at once opened fire against the enemy's guns. The Hessians [having the support of artillery, sent up to the front] now rushed up the hill under a heavy fire in order to take the redoubt. Here they experienced a more obstinate resistance than they had expected. They found large bodies of troops behind the work and at its sides, chiefly wild looking men in their shirt sleeves, and among them many negroes. On the right flank, which Malsburg now led, in place of the wounded Murarius, a number of the enemy who had been concealed behind a wall, now suddenly appeared and poured in a heavy fire. Now that the walls and garden hedges stretching around, were strongly garnished with riflemen, Malsburg saw himself obliged, in order not to be cut off, to fall back somewhat, and to post himself again behind a wall lying to the right of the main road. His dog, running behind him, which had been his companion since leaving home (Germany), was shot here. Meanwhile, General von Lossberg, with the left wing of the army [British], to which the four Hessian regiments belonged,

had reached Turkey Hill. He sent forward at once the regiments Huyne and Beyreuth, as well as the King's Rangers, as reinforcements. By the putting in line of these regiments Malsburg was separated from his left wing. He moved forward, however, with the reinforced line in which he had the Rangers on his left, until a dragoon brought him intelligence that a strong column of the enemy was advancing on his right flank. He therefore at once took position behind a wall, lying on his right, and by means of which he could completely cover the threatened flank. Meanwhile, the Americans on Barrington's and Bull's Hill [probably Butts Hill, constituting part of Quaker Hill] were continually reinforced, and fresh columns came into the fight. The struggle grew fierce. The superior numbers of the enemy became too great, and finally our troops were obliged, fighting as they fell back, to withdraw to Turkey Hill. It was four, p. m. Malsburg and his men had been from seven, a. m., almost without respite, under fire, and had for all this, only four dead and one officer and fourteen men wounded. His orders were to cover the left wing on the west-

ern coast. The cannonade continued, and at evening some of the enemy's battalions held possession of a wall lying some three hundred paces from our front. The ammunition, which was already a second time exhausted, was here again replenished.

During the nights of the 29th and 30th the entire forces remained under arms. Notwithstanding the great bravery and endurance of the troops, who had been under such a heavy and protracted fire, the results were not satisfactory. The supports remained too far in the rear to maintain and profit by the advantages obtained. Had the advanced British been able to properly occupy the Barrington and Windmill Hills, and to follow the Americans up with energy, a great part of them would have been obliged to lay down their arms, or would have been driven into the water. They were actually in retreat, about to cross Bristol Ferry, but seeing that they had to do with an opponent much inferior in force, who, beside this, had ventured too far forward and was too isolated from support, they desisted from their crossing, turned back again, and were able to throw their whole strength against the British pursuers. These

last [British] were part too much worn out to prevent them retaking the positions they had lost.

On the thirtieth [August], there began again a mutual cannonade, which lasted the greater part of the day, but which had very little effect. The Americans, it was supposed, would attack. They remained quiet, however, and only threw up some works on Barrington's Hill. On the thirty-first, they were gone. They had in perfect stillness withdrawn during the night, and crossing the strait [Bristol Ferry], encamped on the other side of Bristol. The fifty-fourth Landgraf and the von Dittfurth regiments immediately occupied the abandoned heights.

The loss of the Germans consisted of nineteen dead, ninety-six wounded and thirteen missing; among these fourteen officers. The British lost one hundred and fifty-seven men.* The Regiment von

*The British loss is taken from Brigade-major Makenzie, of the British army. Malsburg gives, in his very full Journal, the loss of the Huyue regiment at eighty-seven. Among the dead was also Captain von Schallern. Captain Wagner, who died soon after from his severe wounds, was buried at Newport on the sixteenth [September] with all military honors.

The Rebels and Rebel sympathizers of 1865 seem to have credited the Union

Huyne had suffered the most severely, since it had five dead, fifty-seven wounded and twelve missing.

American deserters reported that their loss had been between four hundred and five hundred men. We had reckoned it at about three hundred. General Sullivan, in his report to Congress after the thirty-first August, gives the American loss at two hundred and twenty-one men.

If one reflects on the hot fight of the twenty-ninth, which continued almost unbroken for nine hours, and the continued cannonade on the next day (thirtieth), the loss is incredibly small.

In the report of General Sullivan, just cited, it is further mentioned that, upon the withdrawing of the allies (British and Germans), he had been inclined to attack their lines, but his men were too hungry and too tired; also, that he had only fifteen hundred troops who had previously been under fire, the rest consisting entirely of fresh recruits.

losses during the pursuit of Lee to the single action of Cumberland Church, to make good an exaggerated story of "big fighting" at this point, seventh April, 1865. Americans writing in regard to the engagement of the twenty-ninth August, 1778, may have innocently charged the losses of the whole campaign or operation to the close fighting of less than an hour in or about Quaker Hill.

On the first September a large fleet again approached Newport. It was the long expected General, Sir Henry Clinton himself, with no less than seventy-two ships, bringing forty-five hundred men.

Had he arrived a few days earlier, the Americans would not have retreated so easily as on the twenty-ninth.

He had been a long time detained in the Sound by contrary winds. With a numerous suite, the General-in-chief stepped on land amid the thundering salute of the cannon. He inspected at once the defensive preparations and soon convinced himself of the extremely precarious situation in which the garrison of the island had been. In a special order of the day, he praised the bravery and endurance of the troops, and of this praise the Germans received a good share. On the very next day he again took ship, after making such farther arrangements as were necessary.

Now, for the first time, the troops were able to again breathe and enjoy themselves in partaking of the fresh provisions which the fleet had brought with it.

S

EXTRACTS FROM AN ADDRESS

BY THE

HON. ZACHARIAH ALLEN,

BEFORE THE

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

FEBRUARY 4TH, 1861.

N O T E .

THE narrative here presented, of conversations held with General Lafayette, is in its present connection of historic interest. The conversation occurred on the occasion of General Lafayette's visit to Providence in 1824. Mr. Allen and Colonel Ephraim Bowen were sent by the Committee of the Town of Providence to meet Lafayette at the Connecticut line, as he journeyed from New York to Boston. They met him at Plainfield, and this conversation took place in the carriage.

CONVERSATIONS WITH LAFAYETTE.

It is my purpose, in this address, to read some of the historical statements made by Lafayette in relation to Sullivan's expedition, wherein he commanded the left wing of the American army, and General Greene the right wing. Some statements on other subjects of historical interest, in relation to his campaigns in the American war, will be added. To render his narrations of the events of Sullivan's Expedition more intelligible, a brief abstract from the published history thereof may be serviceable as a preliminary sketch :

" Whilst Newport was in possession of the British army of seven thousand men, in the year 1778, a French fleet of twelve ships of the line and four frigates, suddenly entered Narragansett Bay, and

destroyed or captured all the English frigates and sloops of war found there. The French Admiral landed three thousand troops to co-operate with ten thousand American troops under General Sullivan. On the same evening Lord Howe, with thirteen ships of the line, appeared off Point Judith, and during the night the French troops were re-embarked, and the next day the French fleet went out to sea to attack the enemy, leaving General Sullivan with his army on the island, in front of the intrenchments of the English army."

Soon after the French fleet sailed out of port, a most violent tempest arose, which damaged both hostile fleets more than the battle that ensued, dismasting the great ship of the French Admiral, and disabling most of the others. In the history of that disastrous storm it is narrated that "its fury was no less dreadful on the shore. The tents were blown down, and the army exposed on the wet ground to a cold and drenching rain. Some of the men died from exposure, and a great number of horses perished. The Americans continued to cannonade the British entrenchment until the return of the French

fleet, which caused great joy to the assailants; for the capture of the whole British army now seemed certain within forty-eight hours. But great was the consternation the next day when the French Admiral announced his intention to depart with his fleet immediately for Boston, to repair his disabled ships; and he actually sailed at night-fall."

The American volunteer troops, discouraged by this desertion of their ally, began to leave the island, and General Sullivan found it necessary to retreat. He was pursued and attacked by the British troops, and the "battle of Rhode Island" ensued. The American army escaped from the island in the night, and the next day the British fleet returned with five thousand fresh troops, which would have cut off their retreat.

The conduct of DeEstaing became a subject of violent discussion in Congress, and of general complaint throughout the country for having twice abandoned all co-operation with the American troops at critical moments, when a few hours more of further perseverance were requisite to capture a British army. For this conduct no satisfactory reasons or

explanations appear in the history of those times to have been given by DeEstaing, and his name became dishonored.

The true reasons which led to the unfortunate course pursued by the French Admiral, were known personally to Lafayette, who attended the council of French officers to which the Admiral referred the question for decision, whether to go out to attack the enemy's fleet, or to remain to complete the capture of the enemy's army. The reasons that influenced their decision, will now be detailed in the form they were stated to me by General Lafayette.

Soon after breakfast the General took his seat in the carriage with Colonel Bowen and myself, and left Plainfield (Connecticut), followed by several carriages, in which were the aids of the Governor of Rhode Island, and some Aldermen from New York, who had followed the General from that city. After being informed that he had passed the boundary line of Rhode Island, the General exclaimed: "In this State I have experienced more sudden and extreme alternations of hopes and disappointments than during all the vicissitudes of the American war. When

the French fleet arrived in Rhode Island, in the year 1778, I was assured of the certain capture of the British army in Newport, from an arranged plan for a combined attack of the American and French forces. Just at the moment of preparation, it was suddenly announced that an English fleet had appeared off the entrance to the port. I then went on board of the Admiral's ship, and heard the question discussed, whether the fleet should remain to co-operate with the American army, in the proposed attack on the British army in Newport, or go out to sea to attack and drive away the British fleet from the coast. The council decided in favor of the latter plan."

In answer to my inquiry, what were the reasons that led to this decision, the General replied: "It was urged that by adopting the plan of attacking the enemy's fleet, a double victory might be obtained by the French arms, on the sea as well as on the land. Our superior fleet, in driving away the British fleet, would have a chance of cutting off two or three of their ships of the line; and on their return to Newport, the British army, besieged by land, would soon yield a bloodless victory to the overpowering com-

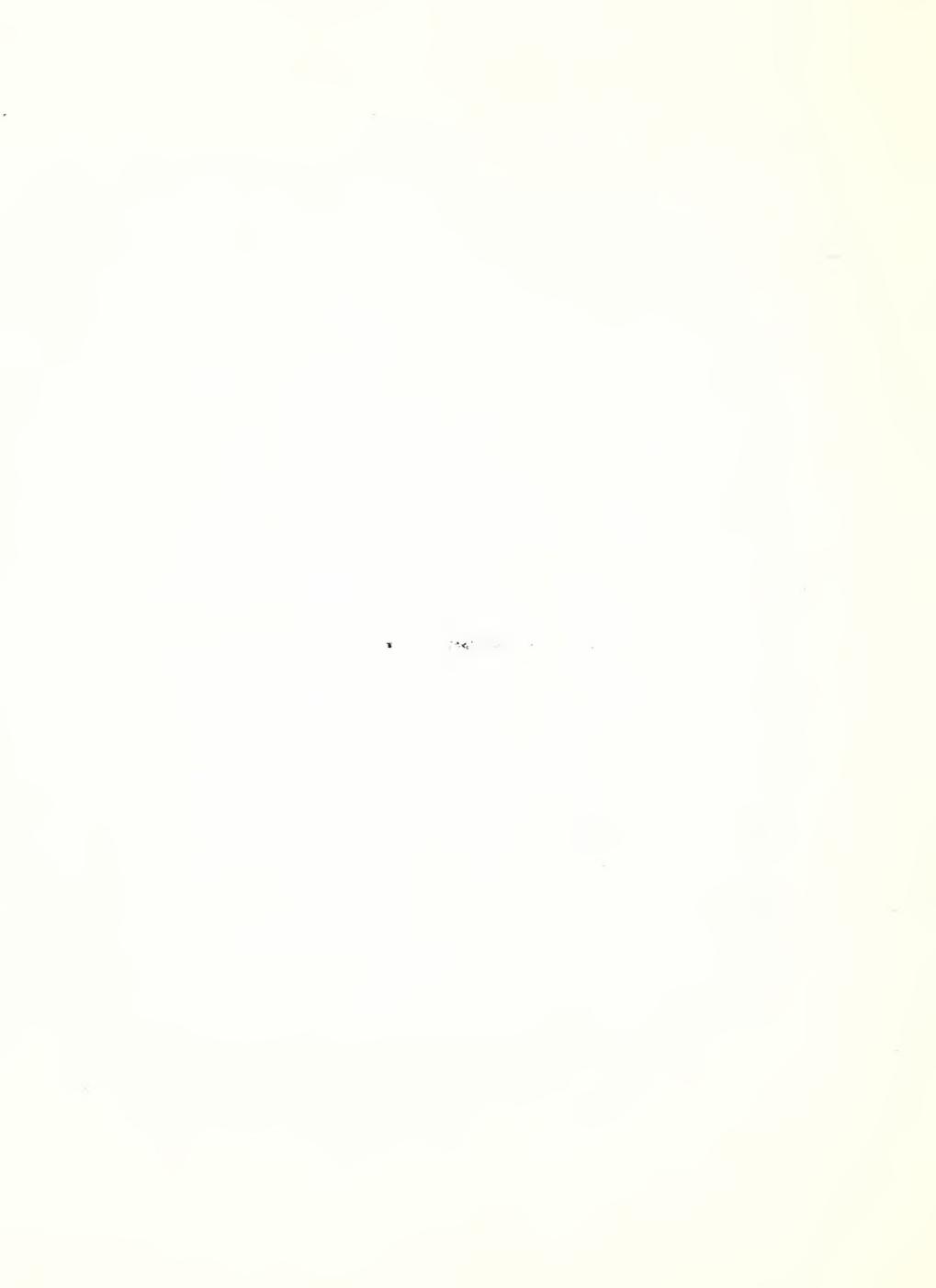
bined French and American forces." He continued : " When I saw the French fleet sail out of the harbor, I felt the first great disappointment of my sanguine hopes ; but then I immediately began to have them revived in the expectation of seeing the fleet speedily return, with some of the British ships as prizes. But a great tempest arose soon after the fleet went out upon the open sea, which dismasted several of the ships, and they all came back in a disabled condition." Lafayette then proceeded to narrate an anecdote of one of his intimate friends, who commanded a ship of the line ; which after being dismasted, was attacked by a frigate, and saved from capture by the approach of another French ship. His friend told him after his return, that for a time he became so much excited by the very idea that a ship of an hundred cannons should be captured by a frigate, and by the belief that in the history of the event, no allowance would be made for the wrecked condition of his ship, to mitigate the disgrace, that he put his pistols in his pocket with the fixed determination to shoot himself through the heart rather than survive the dishonor.

The British fleet was actually driven away from the coast by the French fleet, as had been calculated, and two or three vessels were cut off and taken. On the return of the French fleet, he said his hopes were revived more strongly than before to the certain capture of the British army. But these fresh hopes were excited only to be more greatly disappointed than before; for DeEstaing again held a council of his officers, who decided to depart immediately with the whole fleet for Boston for repairs. He continued: "My most earnest entreaties for him to stay only a short time to finish the conquest of the British army were all in vain."

In answer to my inquiry for the reason of this second obstinate refusal to co-operate with their allies, the General replied that it was said in the council of officers, they held it to be their first duty as naval commanders, to sustain the superiority of the French fleet on the ocean, to escape being shut up in port, and subjected to destruction by fire ships whilst at anchor in their disabled condition. This all important object could only be accomplished by losing no time in sailing for Boston, before the re-

turn of the British fleet, to which port they had been ordered to go for repairs in case of necessity. He continued : "When I again saw the French fleet sail out of the port for the last time, and abandon the capture of the British army, I felt this to be the most bitter disappointment of all, for I believe that this capture would have produced the same decisive result of speedily terminating the American war, as was subsequently accomplished by the capture of nearly the same army at Yorktown, by the successful co-operation of the French fleet under Count De Grasse under similar circumstances."

Lafayette finished his narrative of the exciting events of his campaign in Rhode Island by saying that one hope still remained to him, that of inducing the French Admiral to return to Newport with his fleet. To accomplish this he said that he made the journey from Rhode Island to Boston, by relays of horses, in the shortest time that it had ever been performed. After this effort he despaired. To add to his chagrin, during his absence the battle of Rhode Island was fought, and he lost the chance of taking part in it. But to console him for this disappoint-



ment, he said, Congress, in the vote of thanks which they decreed, noticed him with the most refined delicacy, not for having fought the battle, but for his sacrifice of the opportunity of gaining personal glory, to aid the cause of the country more effectually by his services elsewhere.

The preceding explanations of the reasons for the apparently obstinate refusal of DeEstaing to co-operate with the American army in Rhode Island, thereby causing the failure of Sullivan's Expedition, and the keenest disappointment of the sanguine hopes of Lafayette, as well as of all the American people, lead us to the belief that the French Admiral acted under the influence of a council of his officers, and not from any discordant feelings towards General Sullivan. The practical results of the execution of the plan of the council of officers almost exactly verified their calculations, so far as related to the chasing away the English fleet, and the capture of two of their vessels which were cut off; and there is now every reason to believe that the remainder of their plan of winning also a victory on the land, might have been successful, had not several of the large

ships of their fleet been providentially dismasted by
a tempest unprecedented for violence in the annals
of the country.

L E T T E R

FROM

MAJOR-GENERAL PIGOT

TO

GENERAL SIR HENRY CLINTON,

GIVING A DETAIL OF

MILITARY AFFAIRS AT NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, FROM
JULY 31ST, TO AUGUST 31ST, 1778.

LETTER FROM MAJOR-GÉNÉRAL PIGOT

TO

GENERAL SIR HENRY CLINTON.

DATED AT NEWPORT, R. I., AUGUST 31, 1778.



THOUGH by my several letters since the 29th of July last, more especially by that I had the honor of writing by Lieutenant-colonel Stuárt, and the accuracy of his intelligence, your Excellency will have been informed of the state of affairs here to the twenty-eighth instant; yet, as many of those letters, from the uncertainty of the communication, may not have reached you, a summary of the transactions since the twenty-ninth of July, when the French fleet arrived, to the last period, will not be unnecessary, and may help to explain subsequent events.

From the first appearance of the fleet to the eighth instant, our utmost exertions were directed to removing to places of security the provisions, ammu-

nition, and military and naval stores, which were either on board ship, or on the wharfs, preparing a fortified camp, and disposing everything for resisting the combined attacks of the French and rebels upon us ; and I immediately withdrew from Conanicut, Brown's Provincial corps, and two regiments of Ansbach, which had been stationed there. The next morning the guns on the Beaver Tail and Dumplin batteries, the former of which was directed with some effect against two line of battle ships that entered the Narragansett passage, were rendered unserviceable, as the fleet entering the harbor, would cut off all communication with that island ; of which the French Admiral soon after took a temporary possession, and landed the marines of his squadron. During this period, from the movements of the French ships in the Seaconnet on the thirtieth, the King's Fisher and two gallies were obliged to be set on fire ; and afterwards, on the fifth instant, the four advanced frigates, from the approach of two of the enemy's line of battle ships from the Narragansett, were likewise destroyed, after saving some of their stores, and securing the landing of the seamen.

When it was evident the French fleet were coming

into the harbor, it became necessary to collect our forces, and withdraw the troops from the north parts of the island, which was accordingly done that evening. I likewise ordered all the cattle on the island to be drove within our lines, leaving only one cow with each family, and every carriage and intrenching tool to be secured, as the only measures that could be devised to distress the rebels and impede their progress.

On the eighth instant, at noon, the French fleet (which from its appearance had continued with little variation at anchor about three miles from the mouth of the harbor) got under way, and standing in under a light sail, kept up a warm fire on Brenton's Point, Goat Island and the north batteries, which were manned by seamen of the destroyed frigates, and commanded by Captain Christian, Lieutenants Forrest and Otway, of the navy, who returned the fire with great spirit, and in a good direction. The last of these works had been previously strengthened, and some transports sunk in its front, as an effectual measure to block up the passage between it and Rose Island.

The next morning we had the pleasure to see the English fleet, and I immediately sent on board to communicate to Lord Howe our situation, and that of the enemy. By nine o'clock the following day the French fleet re-passed our batteries, and sailed out of the harbor, firing on them as before, and having it returned with equal spirit on our side. By this cannonade from the ships on both days, very fortunately not one man was hurt, or any injury done, except to some houses in town.

I shall now proceed to inform your Excellency of the movements of the enemy from the ninth instant, when they landed at Howland's Ferry.

The badness of the weather for some days must have prevented their transporting of stores, or being in readiness to approach us, as they did not make their appearance near us till the fourteenth, when a large body took possession of Honymans Hill.

To repel any attempts from that quarter, a breast-work was directed to be made along the heights from Green End to Irish's Redoubt, which was strengthened by an abatis.

On the seventeenth, the enemy was discovered

breaking ground on Honyman's Hill, on the summit of which, and on their right of the Green End road, they were constructing a battery : the next day another was commenced by them for five guns to their left, and in a direct line with the former, which was prepared for four. On this day a line of approach was likewise begun by them from the battery on the right to Green End road, which works we endeavored to obstruct by keeping a continual fire on them. The nineteenth the enemy opened their left battery, which obliged our encampment to be removed further in the rear. This day we began another line, for the greater security of our left, from Irish's Redoubt to Fomini [sic] Hill ; and I directed a battery of one twenty-four and two eighteen pounders to be raised on our right breast-work to counteract those of the enemy, which were opened the following day, when they were observed busied in forming a second approach from the first, to a nearer distance on the road.

At noon the French fleet again came in view, much disabled, and anchored off the port, where it continued till the twenty-second, when it finally disappeared.

This day the rebels were constructing two other batteries much lower down the hill than the former, one on the right for five, the other on the left of Green End road for seven guns, both which were opened the next day, when I found it necessary to attempt silencing them, and therefore ordered a battery for seven heavy guns, on commanding ground, near Green End, which, from the obstructions given by the enemy's fire, could not be completed till the twenty-fifth, when the rebels thought proper to close the embrasures of their lower batteries, and make use of them for mortars. During this time they had been constructing on the height of the east road, another for one of thirteen inches; and this day began a third approach in front, and to the right of their lower batteries.

The twenty-sixth, observing the enemy to discontinue their works, and learning, from deserters, they were removing the officers' baggage and heavy artillery, I detached Lieutenant-colonel Bruce, with a hundred men of the Fifty-fourth regiment, in the night, over Easton's Beach, in quest of intelligence, who with great address surprised and brought off a

picket of two officers and twenty-five men, without any loss. Some of Colonel Fanning's corps, at different times, exerted themselves in taking off people from the enemy's advanced posts; but little intelligence to be depended upon was ever obtained from them; nor were other attempts to procure it more efficacious, as from all that could be learned, it was doubtful whether their intentions were to attack our lines or retreat.

On the twenty-seventh the Sphynx and two other ships of war arrived; and I had the honor of being informed by Colonel Stuart of your Excellency's intention to reinforce this post.

On the following day the Vigilant galley took a station to cover the left flank of the army; and at ten o'clock that night the rebels made an attempt to surprise a subaltern's picket from the Ansbach corps, but were repulsed, after killing one man, and wounding two others.

The twenty-ninth, at break of day, it was perceived that the enemy had retreated during the night, upon which Major-general Preseot was ordered to detach a regiment from the second line under his

command, over Easton's Beach, towards the left flank of the enemy's encampment, and a part of Brown's corps was directed to take possession of their works. At the same time Brigadier-general Smith was detached with the Twenty-second and Forty-third regiments, and the flank companies of the Thirty-eighth and Fifty-fourth, by the east road. Major-general Lossberg marching by the west road, with the Hessian chasseurs and the Ansbach regiments of Voit and Seaboth, in order, if possible, to annoy them in their retreat; and upon receiving a report from General Smith, that the rebels made a stand, and were in force upon Quaker's Hill, I ordered the Fifty-fourth and Hessian regiment of Huyn, with part of Brown's corps to sustain him; but before they could arrive, the perseverance of General Smith, and the spirited behavior of the troops had gained possession of the strong post on Quaker's Hill, and obliged the enemy to retire to their works at the north end of the island. On hearing a smart fire from the chasseurs engaged on the west road, I dispatched Colonel Fanning's corps of provincials to join General Lossberg, who obliged the rebels to quit two redoubts

made to cover their retreat, drove them before him, and took possession of Turkey hill. Towards evening, an attempt being made by the rebels to surround and cut off the chasseurs, who were advanced on the left, the regiments of Fanning and Huyn were ordered up to their support, and after a smart engagement with the enemy, obliged them to retreat to their main body on Windmill Hill.

To these particulars I am in justice obliged to add Brigadier-general Smith's report, who, amidst the general tribute due to the good conduct of every individual under his command, has particularly distinguished Lieutenant-colonel Campbell and the Twenty-second regiment, on whom, by their position, the greater weight of the action fell. He also mentions with applause the spirited exertions of Lieutenant-colonel Marsh, and the Forty-third regiment, of Captains Coore and Trench, who commanded the flank companies. He likewise acknowledges particular obligations to all the officers and men of the Royal Artillery, as also to the seamen who were attached to the field pieces ; and has expressed his thanks to Captain Barry, of the Fifty-second regiment, who was a

volunteer on this occasion, and assisted in carrying his orders. General Lossberg has given his testimony of the very good behavior of the Ansbach corps, commanded by Colonel de Voit, and of Captains Malsburg and Noltenius, with their companies of chasseurs.

After these actions, the enemy took post in great numbers on Windmill Hill, and employed themselves in strengthening that advantageous situation.

This night the troops lay on their arms on the ground they had gained, and directions were given for bringing up the camp equipage.* Artillery were likewise sent for, and preparations made to remove the rebels from their redoubts; but by means of the great number of boats, they retreated in the night of the thirtieth over Bristol and Howland's Ferry; thus relinquishing every hold on the island, and resigning to us its entire possession.

During these tedious and fatiguing operations, I was much indebted to the active zeal of Captain Brisbane and all the captains, other officers and men of the navy, who enabled me to man the different batteries with their most experienced officers, and best

men, who by their example and constant attention contributed much in the support of the defences. And I must also take notice of the good inclination for the service shown by the marines of the different ships, which occasioned my giving them in charge the defence of that principal post on Fomini [sic] Hill. Nor can I conclude this account, without expressing my sincere acknowledgments to every officer and soldier under my command, and to the several departments, for their unwearied exertions to counteract so many difficulties.

The prisoners taken on the twenty-ninth are not many in number; but I have reason to believe the killed and wounded of the rebels is greater than that in the return I have the honor to inclose you of ours.

(Signed)

R. PIGOT.

ALMON'S REMEMBRANCE, 1778-9, p. 32.

NOTE.—In his return of killed, wounded, and missing for August twenty-ninth, General Pigot gives the following totals: One captain, one volunteer, four sergeants, thirty-one rank and file, one driver, killed. Two captains, five lieutenants, seven ensigns, thirteen sergeants, one drummer, one hundred and eighty rank and file, two drivers, wounded. One lieutenant, one sergeant, ten rank and file, missing.

L

R E P O R T

OF

MAJOR-GENERAL SULLIVAN

TO THE

PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

CONCERNING THE

OPERATIONS ON RHODE ISLAND.

GENERAL SULLIVAN'S REPORT

TO THE

PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS.

HEADQUARTERS, TIVERTON, August 31, 1778.

ESTEEMED SIR:—Upon the Count DeEstaing finding himself under a necessity of going to Boston to repair the loss he sustained in the late gale of wind, I thought it best to carry on my approaches with as much vigor as possible against Newport, that no time might be lost in making the attack upon the return of his fleet, or any part of it, to co-operate with us. I had sent expresses to the Count to hasten his return, which, I had no doubt, would at least bring part of his fleet to us in a few days. Our batteries played upon the enemy's works for several days with apparent good success, as the enemy's fire from the outworks visibly grew weaker, and they began to

abandon some of those next us ; and, on the twenty-seventh, we found they had removed their cannon from all the outworks except one. The town of Newport is defended by two lines, supported by several redoubts connected with the lines. The first of these lines extends from a large pond called Easton's Pond, near to Tonomy Hill, and then turns off to the water on the north of Windmill Hill. This line was defended by five redoubts in front. The second line is more than a quarter of a mile within this, and extends from the sea to the north side of the island, terminating at the north battery. On the south, at the entrance by Easton's Beach, where this line terminates, is a redoubt which commands the pass, and has another redoubt about twenty rods on the north. There are a number of small works interspersed between the lines, which render an attack extremely hazardous on the land-side, without a naval force to co-operate with it. I, however, should have attempted carrying the works by storm, as soon as I found they had withdrawn their cannon from their outworks, had I not found, to my great surprise, that the volunteers, which composed a great part of

my army, had returned, and reduced my numbers to little more than that of the enemy. Between two and three thousand returned in the course of twenty-four hours, and others were still going off, upon a supposition that nothing could be done before the return of the French fleet. Under these circumstances, and the apprehension of the arrival of an English fleet with a reinforcement to relieve the garrison, I sent away all the heavy articles that could be spared from the army to the main; also a large party was detached to get the works in repair on the north end of the island, to throw up additional ones, and put in good repair the batteries at Tiverton and Bristol, to secure a retreat in case of necessity. On the twenty-eighth a council was called, in which it was unanimously determined to remove to the north end of the island, fortify our camp, secure our communication with the main, and hold our ground on the island till we could know whether the French fleet would soon return to our assistance. On the evening of the twenty-eighth we moved with our stores and baggage which had not been previously sent forward, and about two in the morning en-

camped on Butts Hill, with our right extending to the west road and left to the east road, the flanking and covering parties still further toward the water on the right and left. One regiment was posted in a redoubt advanced of the right of the first line. Colonel Henry B. Livingston, with a light corps, consisting of Colonel Jackson's detachments and a detachment from the army, was stationed in the east road. Another light corps, under command of Colonel Laurens, Colonel Fleury, and Major Talbot, was posted on the west road. These corps were posted near three miles in front. In the rear of these was the picquet of the army, commanded by Colonel Wade. The enemy, having received intelligence of our movement, came out early in the morning with nearly their whole force, in two columns, advanced on the two roads, and attacked our light corps. They made a brave resistance, and were supported for some time by the picquet. I ordered a regiment to support Colonel Livingston, and another to Colonel Laurens, and at the same time sent them orders to retire to the main army in the best order they could. They kept up a retreating fire upon the

enemy, and retired in excellent order to the main army. The enemy advanced on our left very near, but were repulsed by General Glover; they then retired to Quaker Hill. The Hessian column formed on a chain of hills running northward from Quaker Hill. Our army was drawn up, the first line in front of the works on Butts Hill, the second in rear of the hill, and the reserve near a creek, and near half a mile in the rear of the first line. The distance between these hills is about one mile. The ground between the hills is meadow-land, interspersed with trees and small copse of wood. The enemy began a cannonade upon us about nine in the morning, which was returned with double force. Skirmishing continued between the advanced parties till near ten o'clock, when the enemy's two ships-of-war, and some small armed vessels, having gained our right flank and began a fire, the enemy bent their whole force that way, and endeavored to turn our right under cover of the ships' fire, and to take the advanced redoubt on the right. They were twice driven back in great confusion, but a third trial was made with greater numbers and with more resolution, which,

had it not been for the timely aid sent forward, would have succeeded. A sharp conflict of near an hour ensued, in which the cannon from both armies, placed on the hills, played briskly in support of their own party. The enemy were at length routed, and fled in great confusion to the hill where they first formed, and where they had artillery and some works to cover them, leaving their dead and wounded in considerable numbers behind them. It was impossible to ascertain the number of dead on the field, as it could not be approached by either party without being exposed to the cannon of the other army. Our party recovered about twenty of their wounded, and took near sixty prisoners, according to the best accounts I have been able to collect; amongst the prisoners is a lieutenant of grenadiers. The number of their dead I have not been able to ascertain, but know them to be very considerable. An officer informs me that in one place he counted sixty of their dead. Colonel Campbell came out the next day to gain permission to view the field of action, to search for his nephew who was killed by his side, whose body he could not get off, as they were closely pursued. The

firing of artillery continued through the day, and the musquetry with intermission six hours. The heat of the action continued near an hour, which must have ended in the ruin of the British army, had not their redoubts on the hill covered them from further pursuit. We were about to attack them in their lines, but the men's having had no rest the night before, and nothing to eat either that night or the day of the action, and having been in constant action through most of the day, it was not thought advisable, especially as their position was exceedingly strong, and their number fully equal, if not superior, to ours. Not more than fifteen hundred of my troops had ever been in action before. I should before have taken possession of the hill they occupied, and fortified it, but it is no defence against an enemy coming from the south part of the island, though exceedingly good against an enemy advancing from the north end toward the town, and had been fortified by the enemy for that purpose.

I have the pleasure to inform Congress that no troops could possibly show more spirit than those of ours which were engaged. Colonel Livingston, and

all the officers of the light troops, behaved with remarkable spirit. Colonels Laurens, Fleury, and Major Talbot, with the officers of that corps, behaved with great gallantry. The brigades of the first line—Varnum's, Glover's, Cornell's, and Greene's—behaved with great firmness. Major-general Greene, who commanded in the attack on the right, did himself the highest honor by the judgment and bravery exhibited in the action. One brigade only of the second line was brought to action, commanded by Major-general Lovell—he and his brigade of militia behaved with great resolution. Colonel Crane, and the officers of artillery, deserve the highest praise. I enclose Congress a return of the killed, wounded, and missing, on our side, and beg leave to assure them that, from my own observation, the enemy's loss must be much greater. Our army retired to camp after the action; the enemy employed themselves in fortifying their camp through the night. In the morning of the thirtieth I received a letter from his excellency General Washington, giving me notice that Lord Howe had again sailed with the fleet, and receiving intelligence at the same time that a fleet

was off Block Island, and also a letter from Boston, informing me that the Count DeEstaing could not come round so soon as I expected, a council was called, and as we could have no prospect of operating against Newport with success, without the assistance of a fleet, it was unanimously agreed to quit the island until the return of the French squadron. To make a retreat in the face of an enemy, equal, if not superior, in number, and cross a river without loss, I knew was an arduous task, and seldom accomplished if attempted. As our centres were within two hundred yards of each other, I knew it would require the greatest care and attention. To cover my design from the enemy, I ordered a number of tents to be brought forward, and pitched in sight of the enemy, and almost the whole army to employ themselves in fortifying the camp. The heavy baggage and stores were falling back and crossing through the day; at dark the tents were struck, the light baggage and troops passed down, and before twelve o'clock the main army had crossed with the stores and baggage. The Marquis de la Fayette arrived about eleven in the evening from Boston, where

he had been by request of the general officers, to solicit the speedy return of the fleet. He was sensibly mortified that he was out of action, and that he might not be out of the way in case of action he had rode from hence to Boston in seven hours, and returned in six and a half, the distance near seventy miles. He returned time enough to bring off the pickets, and other parties which covered the retreat of the army, which he did in excellent order; not a man was left behind, nor the smallest article lost. I hope my conduct through this expedition may merit the approbation of Congress. Major Morris, one of my aids, will have the honor of delivering this to your Excellency. I must beg leave to recommend him to Congress as an officer who in the last, as well as several other actions, has behaved with great spirit and good conduct, and doubt not Congress will take such notice of him as his long service and spirited conduct deserves.

I have the honor to be, dear sir, with much esteem,

Your Excellency's most obedient and very humble servant,

JOHN SULLIVAN.

P. S.—The event has proved how timely my retreat took place, as one hundred sail of the enemy's ships arrived in the harbor the morning after the retreat. I should do the highest injustice if I neglected to mention that Brigadier-general Cornell's indefatigable industry in preparing for the expedition, and his good conduct through the whole, merits particular notice. Major Talbot, who assisted in preparing the boats, and afterward served in Colonel Laurens's corps, deserves great praise.

To the printed copy of the above report, this note is appended in brackets: [Since the foregoing letter was forwarded to Congress, it has been ascertained that the enemy's loss in the action of the twenty-ninth of August, amounts to a thousand and twenty-three killed, wounded and missing.]*

General Sullivan makes a return of two hundred and eleven, killed wounded, and missing.

* From ARNOLD'S HISTORY OF RHODE ISLAND, Vol. II.

THE CONDUCT

OF

THE BLACK REGIMENT

IN THE

ACTION OF AUGUST 29TH, 1778, ON RHODE ISLAND,

AS GIVEN BY THE

ORDERLY BOOKS OF THE ARMY.

EXTRACT FROM THE ORDERLY BOOK

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT UNDER THE COMMAND
OF COLONEL JOHN JACOBS.

AFTER GENERAL ORDERS, AUGUST 30TH, 1778.

" It having been represented by some persons that the Conduct of Col. Commandant Green's Regiment was not in the action yesterday equal to what ought to have been expected, and also that Major Ward, who Commanded the Regiment, was much dissatisfyed with their conduct. The General assures the officers and Soldiers of the Regiment that no Person has undertaken to censure their conduct to him, and that upon enquiry from Maj'r Ward and sundry other officers who were with them in action, there is not the least foundation for Censure, doubt-

SOME further light is thrown upon the behavior of the Black Regiment in the action of August twenty-ninth, by the Orderly Books of the army. The regiment is referred to on page twenty-seven of the oration. The publisher presents the General Order of Major-general Sullivan as preserved in three of the Orderly Books of the army. The first is from an Orderly Book of the Massachusetts Regiment under command of Colonel John Jacobs, kept by Adjutant Josiah Fletcher, now in the possession of Joseph J. Cooke, Esq., of Providence. The second is from an Orderly Book of Major-General Sullivan's army, now in the possession of Mr. Sidney S. Rider, of Providence. The third is from the Orderly Book of the Massachusetts Regiment under the command of Colonel Paul Revere, now in the possession of the Revere family. There is no essential difference in the three copies of this General Order, yet there are verbal differences, and the publisher considered them of sufficient interest to warrant their presentation.

less in the heat of action Maj'r Ward might have said something to hurry the Troops on to action which by being misinterpreted gave rise to the report, but by the best Information the Commander-in-Chief thinks that Regiment will be intituled to a proper share of the Honours of the day."

✓

EXTRACT FROM AN ORDERLY BOOK

OF

MAJOR-GENERAL JOHN SULLIVAN'S ARMY.

— — —

AFTER ORDERS, 30TH AUGUST, 1778.

"IT having been represented by some persons that the conduct of Col. Commandant Greene's Regiment was not in the action yesterday equal to what might have been expected, and also that Major Ward, who commanded the Regiment was much dissatisfied with their conduct, the General assures the officers and soldiers of that Regiment that no person has undertaken to censure their conduct to him, and that upon inquiry from Major Ward and sundry other officers who were with them in action, there was not the least foundation for censure. Doubtless in the heat of action Major Ward might have said something to

hurry the troops on to action which being misinterpreted gave rise to the report, but from the best information the commander-in-chief thinks that regiment entitled to a proper share of the honor of the day."

EXTRACT FROM THE ORDERLY BOOK

OF

COLONEL PAUL REVERE'S REGIMENT.

AFTER ORDERS AUGUST 30TH, 1778.

"It having been represented by some persons that the conduct of Col. Commandant Greene's Regiment was not in the action of yesterday equal to what ought to have been expected, and also that Major Ward, who commanded the regiment, wa^m much dissatisfied with their conduct. The General assures the officers and soldiers of that regiment that no person has undertaken to censure their conduct to him, and that upon inquiry from Major Ward and other officers who were in the action with them that there is not the least foundation for censure. Doubtless in the heat of action Major Ward might have said

something to hurry the troops on to action, which,
being misinterpreted, gave rise to this report."

NOTE.—The publisher is under obligations to the Hon. Thomas C. Amory,
of Boston, for the copy of General Sullivan's Order as given in the Revere
Orderly Book, and herewith presented.

1277.

7393 1

